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Cassis' Amber Alert Abuse Bill Receives Unanimous Committee Approval

LANSING – The Senate Judiciary Committee today unanimously approved legislation sponsored by state Sens. Nancy Cassis and Mike Goschka to penalize people who falsely report an Amber Alert.

During testimony before the committee, Cassis dubbed the legislation the “AAA” package (Amber Alert Abuse).

The need for the legislation arose from several cases where the Amber Alert system was abused, including a case in Tulsa, Okla., where a woman told police her child had been abducted when her car was stolen from a grocery store parking lot. She later recanted the story, telling police that she wanted a higher priority placed on finding her stolen vehicle. Another case in Edmond, Okla., involved a girl who was out with her boyfriend and convinced her brother to file a false report so that her parents would not know the truth as to why their daughter was not at home.

“A falsely reported Amber Alert ties up law enforcement resources – time, money and investigative efforts that already are stretched thin,” said Cassis, R-Nov. “It’s like yelling ‘fire’ in a crowded theater when no smoke exists. This is a serious offense that would become a felony if this legislation is approved. These vital resources must be available in the event they are needed. People are undermining a system intended to protect children and this legislation will act as a deterrent to those who might abuse it.”

The legislation, Senate Bills 74 and 134 make it a felony to falsely report an Amber Alert and establish a penalty of up to four years in prison and fines up to \$2,000.

“We must take a proactive approach to ensure the kinds of abuses that have happened elsewhere do not occur here in Michigan,” Cassis said. “When we first created Amber Alert, we did not envision that people would come forward and abuse the system. We can take steps to prevent abuse by implementing this legislation.”

Goschka, R-Brant, said: “Falsely reporting an Amber Alert has become a serious problem across the country, and it is important that we establish laws on the books now to send a strong message that such a terrible act will be met with severe consequences if committed in Michigan.”

Cassis sponsored Public Act 712 of 2002, which created Amber Alert of Michigan, a coordinated notification system between national, state and local law enforcement agencies and broadcasters to quickly locate abducted children through radio and television broadcast bulletins.

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